



**Mayor McGeer's Fight Against Crime
In Vancouver**

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VANCOUVER CITY COLLEGE, LANGARA

B. C. STUDIES

RADIO SPEECH

Over CKWX

Sunday, September 15, 1935

10:00 to 10:30 P. M.

A Message of Appreciation

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3415 Ash Street,
Vancouver, B.C.,
September 20, 1935

Mayor G. G. McGeer,
City Hall,
Vancouver, B.C.

Dear Sir,—

My husband and I listened to your radio talk last Sunday night in reference to the crime situation in our City. As taxpayers, we do not feel we should let it pass without commending you for what you have done in regard to the slot machines. We had our own personal trouble concerning them (in May, 1934) with one of our boys, ten years of age, so we know of what we speak.

Our son, along with several other boys older than himself, was using every cent he could get hold of, by fair means or otherwise, and playing on a machine at a store on 25th Ave. and Oak St., across from the school. After a lot of investigation on my part I went to the store and asked the reason why, but, of course, got no satisfaction, so in desperation telephoned the police to see what I could do about it. After talking to no less than four different people, I at last got one man to answer my question, and asked if there was a bylaw that prohibits the use of these machines?

"Well, hardly," he said, "but the only thing you can do is to take the boys in question to the proprietor of the store and tell him you forbid them to use the machines, and if he does let them use it, you can get him in trouble."

So you see, Mr. McGeer, we say "Thank you" for what you have done and "Good Luck" to you.

Sincerely yours,
(Signed) MRS. NELSON HOWARD.

Mayor McGeer's Fight Against Crime in Vancouver

Humanity is rapidly losing faith in itself. Individuals distrust each other and an evergrowing feeling of suspicion warps the judgment of all as they consider the actions of others. The mercenary spirit predominates our entire social structure and it has driven individuals and nations back into the narrow limits of their own selfish existence and barred the doors of confidence which should lead to co-operation based upon goodwill.

There is a deep and abiding conviction prevalent among men that all human actions, particularly of public men, are promoted by unworthy, selfish and mercenary motives. Christians and pagans alike look with complacency upon the ruin of human beings, essential social institutions and constitutional democracy, indifferent to everything that fails to promote the selfish interest of their individual lives. Truly humanity is at the parting of the ways.

A wise and philosophical public leader recently said:

"The undue estimate we place on the value of money is the foundation and origin of the corruption of the times. It is poisoning the life-blood of the nation and marring the beauty of our free institutions with ugly ulcers of dishonesty. It is the great obstacle in the way of social, political and moral reform. It deifies mammon and imprisons man in the dark and narrow cell of his own selfish soul. It turns his thoughts from the contemplation of what is right to the grovelling enquiry of what will pay."

Whether we have intended it or not, our deification of money has resulted in giving to the youth an example that indicates that the chief purpose in life is the acquisition of material wealth. While we may teach otherwise in our schools, the youth can see that the accumulation of money is the gauge of success and that mammon has the foremost place in our hearts.

We have as a result a black and terrible world right in our midst. In the pursuit of money, vice and crime have been commercialized to such an extent that children of tender years are daily being enveigled into a stratum of society so incredibly evil that it produces nothing but crime, criminals and the corruption of public as well as individual life.

At the beginning of this year a condition existed in our own City so vile that it beggars description.

Following his investigation, Chief of Police Col. W. W. Foster advised the Police Commission that responsible members of the police force had made the following statements to him:

1. "Vice is rampant and laws are ignored. The force wanted to do what was right and did not have a chance. Most of the trouble can be traced to a system which encourages vice, interferes with and undermines the police, and finally lets the worst element in the town get control.

2. "The force had no chance in fighting vice. We all know we could not go right out and do our duty. The administration was wrong and interfered with us. If a man was too active he got himself moved to outside stations; when this was the condition it means graft and plenty of it has been going on.

3. "Conditions in the town became so bad that these heads of vicious rackets were pretty well running it. They absolutely ignored us and openly boasted that they could get officers they did not like moved, and they have done so.

The Chief then told the Commission that,

"There has been a condition in Vancouver in which crime and vice have been segregated into various rackets, the heads of which protected by a vicious system and immune from police interference have operated for many years with a contempt for the law and public opinion that is beyond belief.

"To such an extent has the system of protection for white slavery, bootlegging, gambling, dope and confidence rackets developed that Vancouver has become the international headquarters of a revolting type of vice and the natural refuge for criminals of dangerous character."

That was the situation Col. Foster found at the beginning of this year.

Tonight I want to bring to your attention the money value of some of these criminal activities and from which you may draw your own conclusions as to the reason why they were allowed to continue in open operation in our City by those whose duty it was to stamp them out.

SLOT MACHINES

Let me deal first with the slot machine. To a great many people the slot machine is an innocent device which without costing a great deal provides a certain form of entertainment. They do not think of the slot machine as a menace to the youth of the City.

The following true story should place before all mothers and fathers the danger that slot machines, pin-ball tables and all other innocent-looking gambling games are to their own children. In one of our residential districts a boy of tender years came to a neighbor's home crying. He said he had been sent by his father with two \$1.00 bills to secure a pair of shoes which were being repaired. On the way he said he had lost one of the dollars and, fearing to tell his father, he appealed to this neighbor for assistance. The neighbor, in the spirit of a good Samaritan, gave him a dollar and the boy went on his way, but the boy did not return home. After two days of frantic search he was found sleeping in the basement of an empty house. He confessed that on the way to get the shoes he lost the first dollar in a slot machine and that after borrowing the dollar from his neighbor he returned to the slot machine and lost all the money he had. Afraid to go home he became a broken wanderer in the night.

That is only one of the innumerable stories I could repeat to you that have been told to me by mothers and fathers of children who have been victimized by slot machines, pin ball games and other gambling games. The price in suffering children is too high to pay for the pleasure that the gambling games provide.

But that is not the only price we pay. Few people recognize that the slot machine is part of the stock-in-trade of a powerful, well-organized, highly efficient international underworld racket. They do not realize that the profits produced by slot machines are sufficiently great to provide their operators with all the funds that are needed to corrupt elected representatives, responsible public officials and members of police organizations.

But I can tell you that wherever you see slot machines in operation, whether it be in the city or in the country, you can rest assured that some elected representative of the people or some official who is on the pay-roll of the tax-payers is on the pay-off of those whose business is the commercialization of crime.

At the first of the year there were some 500 money slot machines being openly operated within the confines of Vancouver. Their operation was known to the City Council, to the Police Commission, to the police officials, both officers and men, to our police court magistrates and to our city prosecutors and to the public. 300 of these machines were being operated by one individual. The 200 others were being operated by other individuals who had less influence than their more successful competitor.

Now the mechanical operation of a slot machine is such that it can be set to pay whatever amount the operator wishes to return to the players. Investigation has shown that out of every \$100 put into these machines, less than \$10.00 is returned to the players. Just enough is returned to indicate the possibility of winning. These machines, depending upon their location, earn varying amounts, but roughly speaking the average earning of such a machine is placed at \$4.00 a day or \$100.00 a month. 500 such machines operating in Vancouver, therefore, exact a toll of \$50,000 a month or \$600,000 a year, very largely from people who can ill afford to squander money in that way.

Col. Foster informs me that one of the men employed servicing 50 slot machines received \$25.00 a month for each machine, or \$1,250.00 a month as his wages. I point this out to you because I do not want you to think I am over-estimating the profits that the slot machine racketeer secures. The amount I have stated is a conservative estimate.

Once you realize that the slot machine toll in this City totalled \$600,000 a year, or nearly enough to keep 2,000 families on relief, you will appreciate the drag that kind of a thing is on the business and moral fibre of our community.

Now in addition to the money slot machines, there were about 500 other machines of various types in operation. They are commonly known as vending machines, but in reality they were just as evil, and while less profitable, just

as had for the business and moral well-being of our community as the straight money machines.

PIN-BALL TABLES

Now let me deal with a device somewhat similar to the slot machine, namely the pin-ball table. Presented to the public as a game of skill, the operation of the pin-ball table racket is nevertheless based upon very much the same theories and principles that assure the success of the operation of the slot machines.

It is merely a trap set by men to secure profits by exploiting the weakness of individuals. Our City Council, under a bylaw, **actually licensed 919 pin-ball tables which were in operation, along with slot machines, in the vicinity of every school in our City.**

What is the situation today? **The operation of slot machines of all kinds and pin-ball tables has been completely eliminated and anyone who dares to operate one of these devices on licensed premises will suffer the cancellation of his license to do business.**

The bylaw prohibiting pin-ball tables was attacked in our courts and despite the fact that the case against the City was handled by that very learned and able King's Counsellor, Mr. R. L. Maitland, the action failed and we have proven that the City Council can, if it wishes to, prevent the operation of such gambling devices in our City, and **our Council has always had that power.**

The slot machine, the pin-ball table and every other such gambling device corrodes and demoralizes the social and economic security of the community, and I am proud to be able to report to you that we have killed that evil in Vancouver.

By our action in putting all slot machines and pin-ball tables out of business we have saved the people something over a million dollars a year and eradicated a serious menace to both individual and public wellbeing.

CHINESE GAMBLING

Now let me come to another evil, namely Chinese gambling. Of course there are many who say that gambling is inherent with the Chinese people and that it is useless to try and stamp out gambling in Chinatown. Well, I want to say this to those listening to me tonight—that I have had as many complaints from Chinese about the evil of gambling in Chinatown and as many letters of commendation for the work I have tried to in stamping that evil out as I have received from my own people with reference to the gambling evil throughout the City.

There is, of course, an element in Chinatown just as we have an element in our white community, which does not hesitate to commercialize vice and crime as a means of making profit, but the **vast majority of the Chinese people are absolutely opposed to that element.**

But do not think for one moment that the Chinese gambling activities were confined to the Chinese. At the commencement of 1935 there were 24 gambling joints and 22 lottery houses operated by Chinese for white patronage. These places were known to the police and operated openly and with the sanction of responsible authority. In addition to the gambling houses of the Chinese there were 20 gambling dens operated by white men throughout the City. Every one of them operated by professional gamblers and all the tricks and dishonesty of the gamblers' trade were employed. One police officer informed that they were cheating right and left and were breaking the whole city.

Now it is not possible to place an accurate estimate upon the profits secured by Chinese and white gambling dens, but I am informed on creditable authority that the gross profits of such gambling houses during last year totalled **more than \$750,000.**

Some of these gambling houses employed from fifteen to twenty men whose wages and expenses had to be taken care of out of the losses of those, most of whom could not afford to lose anything.

Investigation has shown that these places paid anywhere from \$50.00 to as high as \$300.00 a month for the privilege of operating. Who got the money, of course, will remain a secret between the operators, the pay-off men and the recipients. But make no mistake about it: the kind of protection these places enjoyed was not secured for nothing.

Since the appointment of Col. Foster as Chief, the police have put all these joints out of business. Many of their operators have departed to other places which are more friendly to their type than Vancouver is today. Shue Moy and others sailed for China. Many others left for parts unknown.

BOOKMAKING

At the beginning of this year it was estimated that there were 1,000 individuals in Vancouver engaged in soliciting bets on horse races. An elaborate telegraphic service was maintained at a cost running into thousands of dollars per year. When I came into office the operators of this service came to me and wished to ascertain whether or not I proposed to close down on that type of gambling. Upon being informed that I did, they cancelled this service with the result that this type of gambling is far less flagrant than it used to be. **Of the 171 bookmaking establishments in operation, taking from the people another \$750,000 last year, not one is operating openly today.**

By stamping out open gambling in our City, we have saved the people and for legitimate business a sum of money that totals more than 2½ millions of dollars a year. Of course that has helped business. Ask any business man and he will tell you that business in Vancouver is better today than it was a year ago. You know or you should know that gambling is a vice that is just as dangerous as a malignant infectious disease. Once it starts, it will spread rapidly and, like a cancerous growth in the social system, it will soon eat the heart out of legitimate business.

I can now say to you without fear of contradiction that there is no form of gambling in Vancouver sanctioned by responsible authority which the police can stamp out under the provisions of our Criminal Code and by the exercise of efficient and decent police administration.

WHITE SLAVERY

Now let me deal with another type of commercialized crime that constitutes the most reprehensible of all the methods employed in securing money wealth, namely, white slavery.

There are many people who say that Vancouver is a seaport town and that it cannot be operated on a Sunday school basis. Let us agree with that, but that surely does not justify the conclusion that living off the avails of prostitution should be sanctioned or condoned by those responsible for the maintenance of law and order. Police officers have informed me **"that the situation in Vancouver was so deplorable that they were ashamed to wear the uniform of a police officer on our City streets."**

Now I do not wish to recount the horrible details that were exposed in our courts, but it may not be out of place at this time to draw your attention to the experiences of some girls who were victimized in the City of Vancouver by men whom some police officers say they were not permitted to interfere with.

According to the uncontradicted evidence now on file as part of the records of our court procedure, these facts are disclosed: A girl engaged as a domestic servant, on her day off, visited in North Vancouver. On returning to our City she was waiting for a street car. She was approached by a well dressed young man who informed her that he had been waiting for the car for some time, and apparently they had stopped running; asked her where she lived and informed her that he lived in the same vicinity.

He then proposed that she go to her home in a taxi which he was going to take, and to this she consented. He then invited her to a nearby restaurant to have a cup of coffee. To this she also unwittingly agreed. The next thing she remembered was when she was awakened in the man's room in a hotel where she was kept by force and against her will forced into a life of degradation.

The uncontradicted evidence in another case also shows that a girl not sixteen years of age applied to the Government Employment Agency for housework. Answering an application for a servant through this agency, she went to a home on Point Grey Road. From that home this girl of tender years was taken and placed in a brothel operated for Chinese men, where she was forced to divide the proceeds of her sorry work **with men whom our police state were immune from arrest a year ago.**

I could recount innumerable instances where girls of tender years have been victimized in this way by men known to our police officers for what they actually were.

There were more than 100 brothels and drug dives operating to the knowledge of the police at the beginning of the year. But worse than that, there were 25 men known to the police to be procurers and who were living off the avails of prostitution. They lived in Vancouver immune from police activity and enjoying all the privileges and rights of decent citizens. They were free to ply their evil trade without any fear of interference from the police who were actually afraid of their power. 17 of these men have been prosecuted and convicted, and penal sentences totalling more than 90 years which our Criminal Courts have meted out to them since the first of the year will, I believe, put an end to that reprehensible traffic in our City forever. Others have left the City and there are none now plying the trade that threatens girls of tender years with lives of undying shame.

Vancouver, formerly known as a safe haven for procurers and in which was established a white slave trade that furnished white girls not only to brothels in our own City but to brothels in other cities such as San Francisco, is now free and I am confident that it will remain free from that kind of evil. **Notwithstanding these and other real achievements there are some people who say I have accomplished nothing for the betterment of my City.**

BUNCO RACKET

Now let me come to another activity, the bunco racket. You may have noticed in the papers recently that the United States authorities have rounded up a group of men who, from their headquarters in Reno, Nevada, carried on fraudulent activities which included Vancouver as one of the safe places of their operations. **This group is reported to have swindled various individuals out of a total of over \$2,000,000.**

Prior to 1935 Vancouver was well known as a secure place for bunco men.

During the present year 37 such individuals known to the police as bunco steerers or "duke players" have been forced to leave the City or have been arrested, charged and convicted of various offences and the City is now comparatively free from this type of criminal.

During last year almost every type of underworld rendezvous, such as night clubs, gambling dens, dope joints and brothels thrived in our City. Due to the activity of our present police administration, our citizens can now boast that this kind of thing no longer exists and that our City is maintaining standards of police supervision, regulation and control that make it worthy of the best tradition of the leading cities in the British Empire.

It did not take the criminal element long to realize that they were going to get a new deal in this City following the appointment of Col. Foster to the position of Chief of Police.

You will remember that he was appointed on January 3rd. Let me quote you a despatch from Calgary dated January 10th. It reads as follows:

"An exodus of criminals from Vancouver seeking refuge from the campaign and police investigation, launched by the Coast City's new Mayor, is on. According to Calgary police, scores of men and

some women are making their way to prairie cities. Several former Vancouver men, known to Calgary police by sight, have been ordered from the City and, according to Chief of Police D. Ritchie, others are known to be here and are being sought.

One confidence man telephoned Police Inspector S. J. Patterson. He told the Inspector he was leaving for the East. "I didn't want to be picked up so thought I would phone and tell you I was in town," he added.

At the same time a press despatch came through from Winnipeg under the signature of Col. G. C. Porter. This despatch reads:

"Gangsters and other underworld fugitives from Vancouver are pouring in to Winnipeg. This flight from McGeer's cleaning-up policy is causing the Winnipeg police no little anxiety. "Keep 'em movin' or sock 'em in gaol," Police Chief George Smith told his detective force.

Some are continuing their flight Eastward, some South and sneaking across the line where they may.

Why one big timer arrived here with so many \$1,000 bills that he can't find any place to change them," one police official said."

Yes, and similar reports came from Seattle, Portland and San Francisco.

We cleaned out of Vancouver the element of the underworld that thrived and prospered through money profits which flow from protected commercialized vice and crime. They either fled or went to gaol. We rid the City of the men who were demoralizing our police administration and wrecking the moral fibre of our civic government and destroying the very soul of our City.

Of course those who profited through such means were bitter. Every form of threat was resorted to, and from innumerable and ever flamable quarters attacks, inspired by this element, have been directed against me and our police organization. That is not surprising. It is the counter-attack that always comes. The supporters of the underworld element are crafty and clever, and know how to appeal to the sentimental and emotional prejudices that unfortunately control public opinion in times such as the present.

Of course I was fully aware that I could not put commercialized crime and evil out of business in Vancouver without making powerful and malicious enemies, some of them not recognized as underworld characters, but I was elected to do that job and **I can honestly say to the people of Vancouver that I have carried out my promise to make this City crimeless as far as the commercialization of vice and evil is concerned.**

In the past we have been told that our police were too busy preventing the commission of crimes such as burglaries, highway robberies and the type of crime conveniently called major crime to guard the City against the gambling and vice racketeers. Col. Foster has proven that answer to be pure bunkum and a mere smoke-screen that was designed to conceal the police administration.

Notwithstanding the fact that he had to completely reorganize the police force, making 90 individual investigations with over 50 changes in the personnel of the Criminal Intelligence Department, Col. Foster has been able to meet the Communist revolution, to successfully clean the City of underworld characters and to protect the City more effectively from major crime than it has ever been protected before. All this has been accomplished notwithstanding the drive against criminals in the United States, the presence in our City of hundreds of men who constitute the worst element of those who deserted from the relief camps, and a waterfront strike of the type that breeds trouble for the police.

The records show that the commission of so-called major crime in 1935 as compared with 1934 is actually 10 per cent less if we make proper allowance for the crimes directly attributable to unemployment and strike conditions, it is really 40 per cent less while the convictions secured are 25 per cent more this year than last. The crime record in breaking and entering shows a 30 per cent reduction on the corresponding period of the two previous years.

The total of property stolen shows a gratifying decrease while the percentage of recovery of stolen goods has been increased from 30 to 50 per cent.

As proof of this improvement, may I quote from a letter dated July 18th from the Canadian General Insurance Company to Col. Foster. It says:

"It may interest you to know that our burglary losses for the first six months of 1935 have been very considerably less than in 1934. In 1934 we showed a loss ratio of about 180 per cent for residence burglary insurance, and I am hoping that 1935 will at least allow us to break even.

I feel that the insurance companies owe you their thanks and congratulations on your success.

Yours faithfully,

HEBER BROWN, Manager."

Thus we see that the major crime situation has been greatly improved notwithstanding the fact that many members of the force have been engaged in stamping out commercialized vice, and that more than half the force have been continuously engaged with relief camp and waterfront disorders. Had it not been for these latter onerous duties, I am quite certain that by now we would have a crimeless city.

Notwithstanding all this, there are some in our community who are trying to make the people believe that our police force is not efficient and that I have failed to make good my promise that I would rid this City of crime. **It is that attitude which probably explains why a large percentage of the cases of crime reported to the police have proven, upon investigation, to be groundless.**

In the opinion of the police officials, such false reports are made expressly for the purpose of harassing the police in their work and for the purpose of discrediting the police administration. They are possibly due in part to Com-

ministic activity and in part to the actions of those inspired either directly or indirectly by underworld racketeers. Some, of course, come from the actions of irresponsible individuals.

It might interest you to know that the hoodlumism that marred the visit of Premier Hepburn to our City is a part of the deliberate attempt to create chaos and disorder in our City. It has no doubt been responsible for the 47 false alarms which our Fire Department has been forced to answer during the last six weeks.

May I draw your attention to some outstanding instances of false reports of crime?

On July 8th a hold-up was reported to the police. It appeared in flaring headlines across the full front page of the newspaper as a kidnapping and robbery. The alleged victim was interviewed. Upon investigation the Chief reports to me that the man in question admitted the whole story was false. He was charged with committing a public mischief and sentenced to the time spent in gaol.

Another similar case was reported to the police on September 1st where a man was found tied up hand and foot with shoe laces. Subsequent investigation proved that there was no hold-up but because the man had been drinking, had a wife and four children, was on relief and was supposed to have lost his relief wages of \$37.00, the City prosecutor did not think it advisable to prosecute.

Another similar case took place on September 8th. Two men reported that they had been held up by four men with guns and robbed of \$30.00 and two cases of beer. One of them admitted, under investigation, that the story was false and signed the following statement:

"I now state that my report of our being held up up this morning on Cordova Street and driven by four men to Broadway and Renfrew Street and the sum of \$30.00 taken from one of us by the four men was not true. The story was pre-arranged."

The police advise me that these cases are typical of a great many they have had to spend time investigating and that some of the cases under investigation are even more startling than the ones to which I have drawn your attention.

Now let me summarize for you what has been accomplished. Since Col. Foster took charge he has—

- (1) Investigated and reorganized our police organization and established the basis for the development of a police force that will be a credit to the City of Vancouver. He and the entire force are worthy of your unqualified support.
- (2) He has restored the morale of the force by re-establishing a discipline and training that has the unqualified respect of the men.
- (3) He has established a proper training school in which 250 men have received training and are on reserve available for emergency purposes.

- (4) He has reorganized the auxiliary departments, eliminating many abuses in the gaol, centralizing the Bureau of records and establishing proper supervision over stores and supplies.
- (5) He has improved and made more effective the means of crime prevention and detection. To enumerate:
 - (a) A radio control despatching board has been established.
 - (b) The mechanical equipment has been overhauled and increased.
 - (c) Physical training and development have been re-established.
- (6) He has eliminated commercialized vice and crime with all its attendant evils from our City, and in addition to the work in this regard already outlined, over 910 prosecutions have been launched under the Government Liquor Act and 773 convictions have been secured.
- (7) He has maintained a police organization that has withstood the attempts of Communism to demoralize our City through terrorism and to tie up the port of Vancouver through acts of assault and threats against those who dared to work upon the waterfront.
- (8) Our police organization, through hard work and devotion to duty, is now giving to all citizens a sense of security not enjoyed for years.

Our most successful Exhibition with its record-breaking attendance was free from crime. The Chief informed me that outside of cases of missing or lost parcels, not a single case of pocket picking, theft or bunco activities was reported to the police.

The work of the Chief is not finished for the work of a police organization is never done. Crime and the underworld element can only be kept within proper bounds by the unceasing and persistent work of loyal men who, under proper leadership and discipline, faithfully perform the duty of guarding the liberty of law abiding citizens and protecting them, both as regards their person and their property from the ravages of the enemies of society. There is still much to do.

I think, however, if you will compare the situation today with what it was a year ago and realize the enormous work that Col. Foster and his men have been doing, you will join with me in saying to our Chief and the present members of our police force:

"We congratulate you upon the splendid service you are rendering to the Crown and to the citizens of this great City of Vancouver."